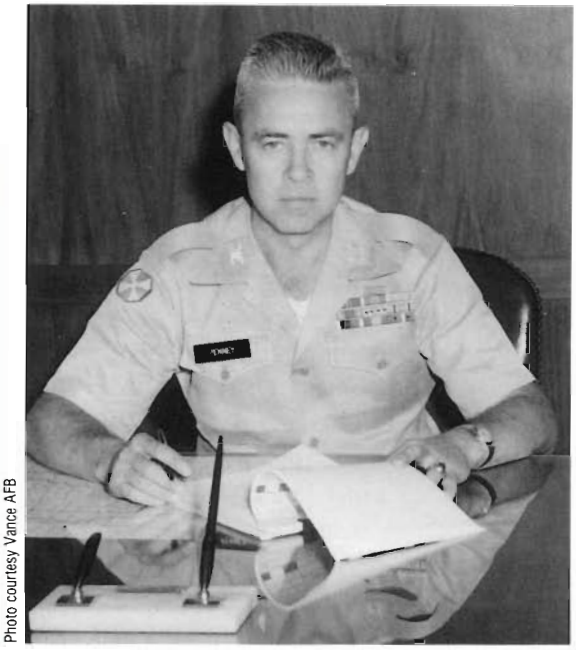

Photo courtesy Vance AFB

Far left: The District landscape includes Vance Air Force Base. Left: Col. Howard W. Penney served as District Engineer between 1959 and 1962.

From the
BRINK
TO THE SKIES was the call of the "homogenized" 1950s:

Eisenhower was in the White House.
Earl Warren led on the Supreme Court.
Joe McCarthy was in the Senate.
Khrushchev was at Camp David.
And, by 1959, Castro was in power in Cuba.

Truman's hope for Communist containment gave way to Dulles' brinksmanship, the new-look, get-tough foreign policy that depended on the atom bomb and defense through "massive retaliation" capability.

In Tulsa, Col. Howard W. Penney took that to heart and installed a fallout shelter in his back yard. But with nuclear proliferation, the nation's theories of defense moved from underground to the skies.

The Corps and the Tulsa District moved into an era of guided missiles, when the Department of Defense in 1957 began erecting surface-to-air missile sites around major metropolitan areas.[4]

And by the winter of 1961, Khrushchev had delivered his saber- rattling speech that prompted John F. Kennedy to declare in his inaugural address:

"Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and success of liberty."

The U.S. must move quickly, Kennedy asserted, to close the "missile gap."

The Corps was launched on an accelerated military construction program to support the massive missile buildup of 1961. The plan called for erecting rocket-launching facilities to intercept and retaliate against a nuclear attack on the United States. For the Tulsa District military mission, the complex ICBM (inter-continental ballistic missile) signaled the beginning of an end of military work.

Defense plans called for building 75 missile-launching sites in the U.S. This included a $47 million facility surrounding Altus Air Force Base, built by the Tulsa District and capable of launching the Atlas ICBM.[5]

The Atlas had a range of 9,000 miles at 16,000 miles an hour and was capable of delivering an atomic warhead. To supply, maintain, and fire the weapon, elaborate ground facilities needed to be built. Each underground storage/launching silo would be 174 feet deep and 52 feet in diameter. Walls would be concrete 12 feet thick; doors, 2.5-foot-thick steel. Each would include an underground bunker housing a crew of five plus fuel, communications, and other support systems.[6]